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# DISCOURSE

Concerning the

# OPERA,

WHEREIN

The NATURE and LAWS  
of that sort of DRAMA are  
explained.

AND

The Moral Use and Excellency of  
it asserted and vindicated, in answer  
to all the Objections hitherto urged  
against it.

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*Doné from the French.*

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# DISCOURSE CONCERNING OPERAS.

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## CHAP. I.

*Of the Nature and Laws of this sort of  
Drama.*



Particular Species of Dramatic Poetry unknown to the Ancients, but which has been cultivated and improved with great Care and Exactness by the Moderns, is the Opera; and that we may treat of it with the more Advantage, and discourse upon this Subject with the greater Order and Clearness, we shall first consider the Nature and Laws of this sort of Drama, and then examine what

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Moral

Moral may best suit with it, or most naturally belongs to it.

The Definition of Tragedy, and the Division thereof into its several Parts, equally agrees to Operas, which contain all that is essential to Tragedy; but further superadd to them three remarkable Circumstances: the first is, the perpetual use of Machines; the second is, the representing to the Eyes of the Spectators and Audience those Actions, which in other Tragedies are only the Subject of Narration; such as the Sacred Rites of Religious Worship, publick Festivals and Rejoycings, Battles, and other Phænomena and Effects; whether Natural, as Storms and Tempests, or Miraculous and Supernatural, as all sudden Changes and surprising Metamorphoses and Transformations, &c. and such like: The third Circumstance peculiar to Operas, and which perhaps at first sight may appear a Fault, is their being all set to Musick.

As for the Machines, they are founded on this, that Operas admit of Deities among their other Persons and Characters; and it may even be all compos'd of such; but then I believe it would less please in this manner: And what renders it much more moving and engaging, is to see Gods and





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and Men mixt together, and become the Object of their Love or Hatred, and so subject to Miraculous and Supernatural Incidents, which the Gods either operate of themselves, or else by those to whom they communicate their Powers. Now the Invention and Contrivance of a particular Dramatick Entertainment and Representation for this purpose is so happy, that the Divine Persons who produce so wonderful an effect in our Operas, appear only so many irregular and extravagant Characters in all the ancient Tragedies; and whereas Machines always show Sagacity and Invention in our Authors, even Mr. *D.* himself † reproaches both *Sophocles* and *Euripides* with theirs, as only showing a barren Imagination and want of Invention. Machines also furnish us with the opportunities and advantage of introducing allegorical Persons and Characters upon the Scene, which don't so well suit with the common or natural Drama; but what should yet more reconcile the Admirers of the Antients to Operas, is that they give frequent occasion to personate the Sun, the Morning, Rivers, and all other inanimate parts of the

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† *Art. of Poet.* P. 248.

Creation, to which the antient Poets have so often ascrib'd Sentiments and Passions. The Supernatural and Miraculous, which still prevails and obtains throughout Operas, justifies also the change of the Scene, since by the help of such Machines, the Actors may be in a Moment transported from one end of the Earth to the other, and even from the highest Heavens to the lowest Hell; and this too without supposing any Miracle. The great Pomp also, and variety of the Ornaments and Decorations in Operas, may make sufficient amends for their not so strictly observing the Unity of Place, which I should not so easily dispense with in common Tragedy.

The Actions, or those natural and supernatural Operations, which in other Tragedies can only be the Subject of Narration, but which the Opera presents to the Eyes of the Spectators, make one of its chief Advantages; and every good Judge will applaud and value the Moderns, for inventing an Entertainment, which represents and images in so lively a manner, if I may use the expression, even Epic Poetry itself; and by that means unites the Merit of both Poems in Tragedy alone. Operas also furnish us with much more probable and natural Dances than

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than the ancient Tragedies ever could: Religious Ceremonies, or publick Festivals and Rejoycings, naturally receive the simple Dances; but we have moreover the Art of Expresing in Metaphorical and Figurative ones, Battles, and even natural and supernatural Actions and Operations, as chang'd into allegorical Persons, such as the Winds and Genii; in a Word, whereas the *Greeks* made only their grave Confidents, who generally compos'd their Chorus Dance; our Operas introduce the Inhabitants or all the subordinate Deities, Demons and Genii of Heaven, Earth, and Hell, to whom Dances whether simple or figurative are much more proper: But as 'tis Musick that chiefly supports these Dramatick Entertainments, and hides and conceals what they may have too bold and licentious; 'tis therefore this use of Musick we are more especially to enquire into and examine in treating of Operas.

Mr. D. observes no measures nor decorum with respect to the Moderns upon this Head: *If Tragedy, says he, † may subsist without Poetry, it may still much more without Musick; and we must own that we*

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† *Art of Poetry*, p. 82.

can't so well comprehend, how Musick came to be consider'd by the Ancients, as making in some sort a part of Tragedy; for if there's any thing in the World that appears foreign and even contrary to Tragick Action, 'tis Singing. This with Submission to the Inventors of our new Tragedies set to Musick, Poems as ridiculous as they're new, and which couldn't be suffer'd if we had any the least true Taste left for true or regular Theatrical Performances; or if we hadn't been herein bewitch'd and seduc'd by one of the greatest Musicians that ever liv'd; for Operas are only, if I may so express it, the Grotesks of Poetry, and Grotesks so much the more intolerable as they would pretend to pass them upon us, for beautiful and regular Compositions. Here indeed we're severely us'd; but we may find perhaps some Consolation in what follows. Aristotle, adds Mr. D. would have extremely oblig'd us if he had told us how Musick came to be thought necessary to Tragedy. Instead of this he contents himself with saying, that all its force and power was known. I have often endeavour'd to comprehend, 'tis still Mr. D. who speaks, the Reasons that oblig'd Men so knowing, of so nice and delicate a Taste as the Athenians were, to associate Musick and Dancing with their Tragical Performances; and after many Enquiries to discover



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discover how it could appear natural or probable that a Chorus, who represented the Audience, cou'd Dance and Sing over such extraordinary and affecting Events; I found they had herein indulg'd their natural Genius and Inclination only, and gratified their Superstition; for the Greeks were the most Gay and Superstitious People in the World, and the most inclin'd to Musick and Dancing.

We see Mr. D. here passes a very severe Censure upon Operas, and a most injurious one to his Country, even in the very Dissertation, where he says, the *Athenians*, of whom he always speaks with so much Respect, departed from Probability and Nature, as well as the true Spirit of Tragedy, by introducing Musick therein; therefore I should think the *Athenians* had better deserv'd the Reproaches Mr. D. here only gives his Country-men and Contemporaries; since they were indeed the first Authors of this Absurdity and Incongruity, whether real or pretended. These Men so knowing, and of so nice and delicate a Taste, and who only sought in Tragedy the Pleasure this Poem ought naturally to produce †; suffer'd

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† Mr. D. Remarks upon the *Art of Poetry*, P. 176. them-

themselves to be led aside in this particular, by their Superstition and irregular and excessive passion and inclination for Musick and Dancing. Yet before we proceed further, I can tell him without any longer deep enquiry, why the *Athenians* joynd Dancing and Musick to Tragedy; 'twas because Tragedy was only, in its first Institution and Original, one continu'd Song of Mountebanks and Quacks, which they afterwards divided into Scenes, taken from some more noble and extensive Subject: The Chorus's of *Æschylus*, which were the first that gave a reasonable Form and Appearance to the *Greek Stage*, are still very long: *Sophocles* and *Euripides* have so far shortn'd and contracted them, especially in the part which was intended only for Musick, that one is tempted almost to think they only preserv'd them, that they might not wholly depart from and renounce the first Original and Institution of the thing; 'tis for the same reason also the Chorus's were continued in their Comedy, where they generally appear absurd to the last degree, and so much the more, that in order to comply with this old Custom and Institution, they were often oblig'd to have recourse

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recourse to Chimerical Persons, such as Clouds, Frogs, Wasps, and such like. In a Word, Musick was not at first introduced into Tragedy from Superstition, Passion, or Inclination, but continued purely upon the Force and Authority of Custom and Prescription.

The Original of Operas among us is somewhat different; I mean their natural Original, for their Historical is not what we here intend to treat of: And we shall find this to have arisen from the prodigious reach and extent, the great improvement and perfection of our modern Musick; for it now furnishing Airs of all sorts which can be perform'd, either with or without Words, being as wonderful for single Voices, as in Consorts, they sought a Method how to unite in in one Dramatick Entertainment all those Advantages. The Actors, who speak upon the Stage, perform the Recitative, a *Duo*, a *Trio*; should we now renounce this Pleasure, or were it better to Sing Words belonging to no particular Subject? But further, the Musical Scenes giving opportunity to joyn the pleasure of Song to that of Declamation, creates a new Beauty most worthy both to be preserv'd and improv'd, and which greatly heightens and adds to the Charms of

of even the Musick it self. We mustn't then consider Operas meerly as simple Tragedies set to Musick; but as Dramatick Entertainments, contriv'd on purpose to reduce and unite all sorts of Musick into one harmonious and beautiful Performance. Now is it not surprizing that barely from such a Union, or upon such an Original and Foundation, they should be able to form and compose a Moral Subject deeply engaging; and does not Mr. *Quinault* upon this account deserve to be esteem'd not only an excellent Author, but an admirable Original? 'Twill be said, I know, that 'tis ridiculous and unnatural for People to pretend to talk and converse together in Musick; the thing is undoubtedly unusual in the common course of Life, and I own, it ev'n seems to shock Reason in a certain Sense; but then consider it in another Light and View, and don't say they converse or reason together in Musick, but only that they sing rational Sentiments; and indeed if we were always confin'd to the first Sense, we must then condemn all Musick set to Words; for these Words express some sort of Reasonings and Sentiments which are not form'd by Singing. Musick then in particular Songs is only a Charm and Beauty super-



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superadded, which we are pleas'd and glad to accept of; much more ought we to accept and receive it from the Stage, where all is transacted by a sort of Deceit and Inchantment: But besides, every publick Spectacle and Representation still rises some degrees above Nature; and if we kept strict to the rigorous Imitation thereof, I cou'd object against Verse, all they object against Musick; the one is as strange and unusual in common Conversation, as the other; 'tis true the *Jambick* Verses, which the *Greeks* and *Romans* made ule of in their Dramatick Writings, approach nearer to Prose than ours; and I own that this was an Advantage wherein they surpass'd us, at least with reference to natural Tragedy; for in Operas the great Liberty and Inequality of the Verse seems to restore us this Privilege. However this is, *Aneas* and *Dido's* Discourse and Conversation, for being wrote in very beautiful and sublime Verse, does not therefore the less please; nor would I suppose have a less happy effect if brought upon the Stage. In a Word, Poetry and Musick shock a little the probability of natural Dialogue and Conversation; but 'tis only in order to afford us a pleasure of another kind, of which the Soul is extreme sensible, . .

ble, and by which it even gains considerably ; provided the Authors know how to manage and conduct aright this sort of Beauty and Ornament, and to give to those Arts, which seem a little to depart from Nature, all the imitation of it of which they are capable.

And therefore not to carry this Discourse further than Musical Imitation will permit, all Syllogism and bare Argument are always avoided in Operas ; and this is the great Art and Secret of those who compose them : for all Plot and Intrigue In this kind of Tragedy, must open and unravel as 'twere of it self, and without any long or deep Reasonings and Deliberations. Mr. B. in an Advertisement inserted in his Posthumous Edition, says, there can be no such thing as a good Opera, because the Passions can't there be drawn at their full length : but he's mistaken ; they are the Political Reasonings and the long Debates and Reflections thereon, that Musick wont allow or permit, but it extremely raises and exalts the Passions, as ev'n Mr. B. himself reproaches it with in his tenth Satyr. Musick even carries some Passions much further, and raises them much higher, than any Discourse, tho attended with all the figures and beauties of

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of Eloquence ever can: Natural Tragedy for example wou'dn't admit the Excess to which *Roland's* Fury and Passion is carry'd with such Advantage upon the Stage in the Opera; therefore we may very well allow the same Reason in justification of the Musick of our Operas, which *Aristotle* does to justify that of the antient Chorus's, when he says, all it's Power and Force was known; and indeed, if the antient Musick had any title to set aside the exact Rules of probability, what might not there be pleaded in behalf of ours, which according to all the reasonable Presumptions and Evidence of things, and so far as we are capable of judging at this distance of time, is infinitely superior to it.

Mr. D. † after producing a Passage of *Cicero*, which proves that the antient Poets were also Musicians, and generally set their own Pieces to Musick, says, this was one of the chief things which gave the *Greek* Poetry the advantage over ours. If I were to shew the great Imperfection of the *Greek* Musick, I needed not only instance this Fact; for 'tis much the same, as if he had said that 'twas the Poets who

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† *Art of Poetry*, P. 102.

compos'd their own Dances, drew the Perspective, and Paintings of their own Scenes, with all their Ornaments and Decorations. Now that the pursuit of a regular Method and Enquiry, peculiar to the Moderns, has carried the Art of Musick to the extream Facility it has attain'd, and that in this Art, as in all others, the Diligence and Attention of him who studies it, need only be intent upon the Elegance and Perfection of his Composition, and has no occasion to suffer his Thoughts to be diverted by any other Consideration. Yet notwithstanding all this, our Musicians, thothus generally free from other Business from their Infancy, seldom or never attain, but with great Labour and Difficulty, to the Happiness of pleasing the Publick: how then in an Age when the very first Elements of Musick appear extream obscure and perplext, and very hard to be understood, cou'd Poets, who were oblig'd to cultivate other Sciences, and exercise their Imagination and Judgment upon so many different Subjects, compose Songs equal or comparable to ours? Besides, tis in Musick, as in every thing else, the meer Knowledge of the Rules of Art, without a Genius or Talent for Composition,



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sition, is a small matter. If Musick had been perfect enough among the Ancients to require such a peculiar Talent or Genius, we would have been told somewhere that *Sophocles*, for Example, had carried the Prize for Poetry, but *Euripides* or some other had carried it for Musick. Lastly, it had been pity that an excellent Poet shou'dn't have been able to have publish'd his Writings, only for having the Misfortune of not being well skill'd in Musical Composition. We have not been v'ble with all our Pains and Industry, and that after the most laborious searches and enquiry, to retrieve or recover so much as a single Line of the ancient Musick; nor but that we know how they expres'd it by the different situation and position of their Letters, which the learn'd *Meibomius* has drawn out at length; and very well decipher'd and explain'd to us, principally from the Text of *Alpinus* and *Aristides*; but 'twas probable because their Compositions were not worth the preserving, and that the whole Secret or Art of them only consisted in chusing among their different Modes and Tones, those they thought most proper to their Subject. The ancient Musick seems only to have been a kind of plain Song, without any regular Counter-part, since the

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Chorus's of a single Tragedy are only compos'd of one sort of Persons, Chorus's of old Men, or young Women; or if both Men and Women, sometimes joyn'd their Voices together, as *Seneca* says they sometimes did in his 84 Letter, it was only to sing the same Thing in an Octave, or some other constant and determined Interval, since he says in the same Place, *Unus tamen ex omnibus sonus redditur*; a Phrase which would be very false and improper, if he meant thereby the Effect of a Chorus singing several Parts. There is even great Reason for us to suspect the Measures and Modulation of the Ancients in their Musick, for they seem'd only to have taken the different Value or Length of their Notes from the Quantity of the Syllables which will almost always accompany a Musick that is too poor and barren to be able to support it self without Words. To conclude, We have nothing left us of the ancient Musick besides a perplex'd obscure and almost unintelligible Theory, notwithstanding the profound and sublime Knowledge we have of Geometry, and particularly that which relates to Musick, as has lately been clearly and evidently made to appear

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pear by the very ingenious and learned Writings of Mr. *Sauveur*; but to be fully convinced of the Superiority of the Modern above the Ancient Musick, we must read the Harmonical Institutions of *Zerlino*, especially his second Part, as well as the learned Remarks of Mr. *Perault*, upon the 4th and 5th Chapter of *Vitruvius's* 5th B. True Philosophers will be but little moved and affected with the great Encomiums the Ancients give their Musick: They know very well that the Ignorance of what is Excellent is the true Source of the Admiration of what is Indifferent, and that what is Indifferent when New strikes us much more than what is most Excellent when become common. Every thinking Man may in this particular, learn the whole History of Humane Nature from his own personal Experience. This is so certain, that the greatest and most excessive Encomiums of the ancient Musick still relate to the earliest and most ancient Times, *i. e.* to those whom we certainly know Musick was more defective and imperfect than it was at any time after among the *Greeks*. After all, if the extraordinary Transports and Passions it then raised in some

some Persons were a Proof of its real Merit and Excellence, and the Perfection it had then attained, we could still produce some like Examples among our selves; for not to instance the Cures of several Distempers, which the Academy of Sciences \* have mention'd, nothing can equal that Pleasure and Transport which some young Persons feel at the hearing of Musick; and if that Air of Modesty and Reserve which now prevails in the polite World did not prevent, they would indeed show themselves actually transported when present at some of the celebrated Performances of our greatest Masters. Even the Opera itself, which Mr. D. files an absurd and intolerable Medley, or Piece of Grotesk Poetry, is called by Mr. B.

*D'un Spectacle Enchanteur la pompe  
Harmonieuse*

To conclude, notwithstanding all the pretended Miracles of the ancient Musick we find so much boasted of by some

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\* Mem. of the Academy. for the Years 1702 and 1707.



Authors, the Ancients have unawares discovered themselves in this Particular, in a Passage still extant in the *Medea* of *Euripides* where the Nurse of this Princess speaking the Truth simply and naturally, makes this ingenuous Confession, " Oh how well did our Ancestors deserve the Name of aukward and ignorant Persons, when they invented Musick for Publick Feasts and Entertainments, only to delight and tickle the Ears : But none of them found the Secret, by Singing and Musical Instruments to soften or divert the fatal Sorrows which Death and extream Misfortunes often bring into Families ; these were the Calamities and Miseries it had been much more useful and important for Musick to remedy ; for what signifies it to bring greater Joy and Mirth into Feasts, which are of themselves but too pleasant and agreeable to us already ? This Passage discovers to us that Musick carries naturally with it a certain Charm, whence it would seem we might expect extraordinary Effects ; the favourable Disposition of some Persons have shew'd us some such in all Ages ; but in all Ages they have also been infinitely rare.

Mr. Dacier won't be offended if on this Occasion I refute the principal Argument he brings against Operas; since in so doing, I shall at the same time justify the Musick and Dancing admitted by the Ancients in their Tragedies. *If there's any Thing in the World, says Mr. D. that seems foreign, and contrary to Tragick Action, 'tis Singing, (and a little lower) how could it seem Natural to the Ancients, that a Chorus should sing in such extraordinary moving and affecting Events?* This Objection of Mr. D's, is founded upon a false Supposition, viz. that Singing is always the Effect of Joy. The first Essays towards Vocal Musick that Men made, probably sprung from Idleness, and I am apt to think that the first Use they made of it when assembled in Societies, and after they had brought it under any Regulation, might indeed be upon Occasions of Joy; but since Musick has been brought to the Perfection of an Art or Science, Men have as often apply'd it to Subjects of Sorrow as Joy. All Nations have introduced it into their Funeral Rites and Solemnities, as well as into their Feasts, Victories

and Triumphs, as Mr. D. himself owns \*. This proceeded hence that they observed that Musick might be made an Imitation, I say that it might be made, for it is not necessarily such, and indeed there are Arts that imitate nothing, Agriculture, for Instance, and Navigation, and several others; there are also Arts that consist wholly in Imitation, as Sculpture and Painting; but there is a third Sort, which in Part may subsist without any Imitation, and are partly capable of it, or may become subject to it; we might instance Architecture as the first Example of this last Sort, for so far as Architecture divides its several Apartments, it imitates nothing; but in the Ornaments of its different Orders, it sometimes imitates the gross and simple Manner of the first Dwellings and Habitations of Men, as in the Dorick Architrave; sometimes the Productions of Nature, as in the beautiful Flow-ers of the *Corinthian* Order. Thus Musick may also subsist, and be even extreme charming without any Imitation, not only by its Harmony and Concords, but also by the mere Disposition and

Ranging of its several Tones, which in their natural Modes and mean Motions imitate and signify nothing: Yet on the other Hand, as it hath both very swift and very slow Motions, and also transpos'd Modes, we can make it very happily imitate when we please, not only the Noise of Winds and the soft murmuring of Waters, but also Joy and Sorrow, and all the other Passions that are distinguished by Accents, and peculiar Inflections of the Voice. The Operas, and even one single Opera unites all these Advantages of Musick; we hear there Songs and Airs that are composed purely to please the Ear, and others that are designed to move and affect the Heart and Soul. Thus then we see Musick may not only be reconciled, but even peculiarly adapted, to Tragical as well as other Subjects.

But if any should obstinately persist and not consider it as an Imitation, but purely as a Song, and a mere Pleasure of the Ear; yet even in this Case I would affirm that Musick continued during the Representation of an Opera, whose Subject were judiciously chose with this View, is much more natural and reasonable than Tragedies of any Sort interrupted regularly by Chorus's. In the Opera,



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Opera, which is always fill'd with Supernatural Persons, Musick is as 'twere a continued and uniform Deceit and Enchantment, that is carried on from the Beginning to the End of the Representation; but in the ancient Tragedies, where we commonly see no Divine Persons, 'twas this odd Medley of Musick that made Singing in Tragedy appear indeed so extreme Absurd and Ridiculous. Nothing slocks more, nor appears so unnatural, for Example, as the Soldiers who compose the Chorus in the *Rhesus* of *Euripides*: What a Choice of a Scene to sing in, was the near Neighbourhood and Approach of an Enemy; and what a Choice of Musicians to sing, were Soldiers who were to watch their most secret Steps and Motions in the profoundest Silence? 'Twas still much worse, if 'tis true what some affirm, that the Chorus sung not only during the Interludes, but also in the Acts, and whilst answering the Persons who discours'd and conversed with them; especially if for an additional Absurdity the Actors also sometimes sung themselves whilst discoursing the Chorus. We have at least some Reason to think that the Chorus and Actors sung all the Verses that don't bear the Title *καρπῶδες* in the Editions now

now extant of the *Greek* Tragedies. Lastly, nothing could be so dull and tedious as still to see and hear the same Chorus throughout a whole Play; whereas in our Operas one and the same Subject furnishes us with Chorus's of all Kinds and Species, which produce an admirable Variety of Musick and Characters, as well as Ornaments and Decorations.

But the ancient Chorus's were still attended with a much greater Inconvenience, with respect to Tragedy; which was that continuing always upon the Stage, and having generally the Character of Goodness and Mercy, this double Subjection render'd most of the Persons who opened and revealed their secret Views and Designs, or the Chorus's, guilty of a criminal Confidence and Correspodence; and notwithstanding the Rashness and Simplicity of the one, and the Baseness and Treachery of the other, this is what always prevented the *Greek* Poets from entering into the Secrets of the Cabinet, or producing any Political Scenes, such as our Stage has so often and so successfully shewn, which can never be formed, but in private and apart, or before proper Witnesses. The Simplicity of the first Men, who lived in the earliest Ages  
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of the World and were the only Heroes of the *Greek* Tragedies, in some Manner excuses the Publick Declaration they so often make of all their secret Thoughts; but the further Advances since, and the great Improvement of Humane Nature both in Good and Evil, and the Business and Commerce of Life being render'd hereby extremely nice and delicate, or much more hard and difficult by the great Abilities and Capacity, and the profound Subtilty and Wickedness of Men, has given Rise to what we call State Politics, and our great Poets have not neglected instructing themselves therein; nor has the Mind of Man ever produced any Thing more beautiful than the Scenes of *Corneil* or even those of *Racin*, where these Politics are display'd: But the Chorus's can never treat with Advantage these Subjects, *i. e.* such as are taken from the Times where the fabulous Ages end, and the historical Ones begin: Yet would it be highly absurd to deprive us of them, with no View but that of subjecting us to a servile Imitation of the ancient *Greeks*. Let us never sacrifice to the Prepossession of their Admirers the Characters and Events posterior to those treated of by their Poets. The great Use and Advantage which may be drawn from

from those Examples that are more conform to our own Manners and Customs, as belonging to more modern Times, will always prevail above a low and superstitious Imitation of a *Sophocles* or *Euripides*. The same Reasoning holds, to mention this by the By, against the Rule of the Visibleness of Tragedy they would impose upon us, and by which they would make us lose all the curious Scenes of the Cabinet, that often compose the whole Intrigue and Plot of some of our best Plays. To shew the great Absurdity and pernicious Tendency of such a Rule, 'tis enough to say that it would destroy such Plays as *Cinna*, *Pompey*, *Britannicus*, and *Mithridates*, *i. e.* the greatest Productions and Master-Pieces of rational Poetry: But besides what means the Publick Scenes of Probability which Mr. D. makes the Foundation of this Rule? Do the Citizens of *Paris*, who see what passes in the secret Council and Cabinet of *Augustus*, as Mr. D. speaks Ironically, \* see more clearly what passes at *Thebes*; and why mayn't we then allow for Fiction in the one Case as well as the other? We do not therefore reject the Ancient

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\* *Art of Poetry*, p. 312.



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or Fabulous Subjects (and indeed our Operas seldom chuse any others) we know and enjoy whatever is fine and beautiful the Ancients were in Possession of, but they did not know all that we put in Practice. So far therefore ought Mr. D. to have been from insulting the Moderns upon account of Operas, and several other Particulars; that on the contrary, he ought to have praised their good Sense and Taste in having one Sort of Tragedy consisting only of natural Persons, and which is performed without Machines, but which especially is divested of Song, which he himself judges so very foreign and contrary to Tragick Action; for as to the Violins he reproaches us with, \* they are only admitted to amuse the Audience between the Acts, and may be suppress'd if he pleases, as the *Romans* might have suppress'd the Flutes which play'd at their Comedies, as they were of Opinion that their Chorus's ought to have been suppress'd likewise. But where is the Inconvenience on the other Hand, in having a Tragedy of a mixt Nature, partly compos'd of Supernatural Persons, and which

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\* P. 314.

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the Illusion occasioned by the Machines and the Musick renders as 'twere present to the enchanted Imagination; in a Word, a Representation carried to all the Perfection that can be expected from the happy Assemblage and Union of all the Arts invented to charm the Mind and the Senses? Had the Opera overthrown Tragedy and Comedy, we deserv'd the Reproaches of Mr. D.; but all these Entertainments subsisting together, the Invention of Operas is an Advantage the Moderns have over the Ancients, and Mr. B. ought to have added it to the many others which he was so just as to acknowledge in a Letter of his to Mr. Perrault.\* The Ancients were in no Condition of having Operas, and their Musick was too imperfect to sustain a distinct Entertainment: but lastly, if they would only have Musick take up the Interludes, have we not several Tragedies and Comedies written upon this Model, *i. e.* Dramatick Operas, such as *Psiche*, the Princess of *Elida*, *le Malade Imaginaire*, the *Citizen turn'd Gentleman*, and several others: We have seen and may see again all these Pieces better perform'd than they

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\* P. 435. Of the Edit. of 1701.

are at present; however we have them in our Hands. But to judge impartially, the Operas and the Comedy unmixed appear better than these Medley-Representations: For when in those they pass from Song to common Conversation, it would seem as if they sunk and fell, and the Ear suffers by being deprived all of a sudden of Part of the Pleasure it before enjoyed; therefore I think 'tis better to refer to the End of the Play all the Musick intended to be perform'd, as they have done of late in most of our Comedies of Three Acts. But let us exclude nothing, considering the infinite Variety of Subjects to be treated: but as I said before when explaining the general Definition of Tragedy, let us give to every Subject all the proper Decorations and Ornaments it is capable of, without subjecting ourselves, as the *Greeks* did, to any Law of Uniformity. This Principle will support ordinary Tragedy, the Tragedy with Machines, and the Pieces compounded of both, which was indeed the only Kind the Ancients knew, of all the three we are acquainted with; it includes the *Greek* Comedy, both the Old and New, the *French* and the *Italian* Comedy; it even extends to all those Sort of Compositions

## 32 . 21 . A Discourse

Positions we are as yet ignorant of, and which Posterity may hereafter invent; lastly, whatever the implicate Admirers of the Ancients can say, it will necessarily and infallibly prevail over all the Rules of Prejudice and Ignorance. In Reality it is the Interest of the Publick to receive, to approve, and to encourage all sorts of Compositions from the highest to the lowest, provided they are well executed. This Indulgence, far from being hurtful to Works of Wit, will contribute to enlarge them. The hurt would be to blend one kind with another at the same time; Comick Scenes, for Instance, would spoil a Tragedy or a serious Opera: But I cannot prevail with my self to condemn, as some Persons do, an Opera wholly Comick, nor does any Thing seem more agreeable to me, than the Skill and Justness of a Musical Pantomime. There is nothing, not even the Discourses of a Mountebank, which a skillful Writer might not work up to some Degree of Excellence, according to its proper Character; had not the Ancients their Syllæ, their Satires, their Attellan Fables, all Pieces of a different and peculiar Character? We have the *Parodies* of *Hegemon* mentioned in the second Chap. of *Aristotle's Art of Poetry*, which

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## Concerning OPERAS. 33

by the Confession of Mr. D. himself \* the *Athenians* were so mightily diverted: What could those be, but a sort of Burlesque Poetry, somewhat like that of Mr. Scarron, which our Critics have treated with such Contempt? Has not Mr. B. himself given us a Mock Epic Poem in his *Lairin*, a sort of Composition Mr. D. calls Monstrous †, without any Respect for the *Batrachomyomachia* ascribed to *Homer*. 'Tis absurd to propose *Theocritus* and *Virgil* for the same Model in Pastoral, because *Theocritus*, more simple and gay than *Virgil* in his *Eclogues*, is also as mean and rustick, as *Virgil*'s is chaste and polite: But tho' those two Ancients had exactly resembled one another, yet those who have any Taste of polite Learning, must be charmed with that new Kind Mr. *Fontenel* introduced, and of which he at the same time shew'd us both the Invention and its highest Improvement and Perfection; if so it is, that this is indeed a new Kind, which the Shepherds in our Romances, had in some Measure before acquainted us with, and of which to carry its Original still higher, the Idea was ta-

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\* *Art of Poetry*, p. 20.

† *Ibid.* p. 59.

ken from the golden Age. This favourable Encouragement and Reception of all the different Kinds, extends itself much farther than Dramatick Poetry, or Theatrical Compositions. We see Men of Learning in different Sciences, who judge one another useless, if not prejudicial, to Society. Let all the Poets and Historians be burnt, says such a Geometer, or Natural Philosopher, provided the Books of Geometry and Philosophy are but preserved. The Sentence is retorted in the same Manner against the Writings of the Philosophers and Mathematicians by the Poet and Historian. What would become of the State and Commonwealth of Learning, if it was deliver'd up to the Conduct and Managèment of such partial and prejudic'd Judges, who would thus maim and mangle it on all Sides? But the Philosopher preserves and supports all of them, independently of those peculiar Prejudices, and unjust Prescriptions; he sees and approves what there is useful and excellent in each, and accordingly always knows how to draw Matter thence, either for his Instruction or Diversion.

CHAP. II.

*Of the Moral Structure and Plan of  
OPERAS.*

THE Distinction of the two Kinds of Heroes in Tragedy, as explained in Chap. 5th, of our Discourse of Poetry, agrees equally to Operas; and in this Respect 'tis wholly in the Poet's Power to render this Drama as Moral as common Tragedy itself: He must only take Care that the Examples and Instructions therein contained, without falling below the Majesty of Tragedy, be yet simple and natural enough to be capable of being adapted to Mulick and Song. And in order to this it will suffice, that the Subjects resemble those of the ancient Tragedies, which their Chorus's have almost already prepared to be also Subjects proper for Operas. But besides, as we often introduce into our Operas Incidents of Joy, to give Opportunity for Mirth and Diversion, that often compose the greatest Part of this Entertainment; Poets who would promote Morality ought not to employ the Voice of Shepherds, and People to spread or propagate Maxims that justify a promiscuous Enjoyment of

all kind of Pleasures: This perhaps was allowable in such Chorus's as assisted at *Rinaldo's* Dream, because the Poet only proposes them as Seducers: But this Practice were intolerable, and most pernicious in Chorus's, composed of Persons that are not introduced or represented under a vicious Character. Yet I don't think it is at all inconsistent with good Morality to introduce Chorus's of Shepherds and Shepherdesses, loving innocently and virtuously, and only with honourable Views, endeavouring to induce and persuade one another to mutual Tenderness and Fidelity. Supposing this Condition which is essential to Virtue and Morality, as these Pastoral Chorus's give us the most lively Image of the Plenty, Happiness and Tranquility of a Country Life, nothing is so useful as often to present such Entertainments before Kings and Princes, in order to return them Thanks in the handsomest and most engaging Manner for their having procured such a State of Peace and Prosperity to their Subjects, and to invite them to continue it. This is agreeable to the Advice, which the wise *Minerva* in *Telemachus* gives to *Idomeneus*, in order to the promoting and multiplying of Marriages in his new Kingdom of *Salentum*, and to that charming Description the Author there



## Concerning OPERAS. 37

there makes of the happy Success of so wise a Council. *At the same time, both the City and Villages round about were fill'd with Sprightly Youth, who long had languish'd in Misery, and durst not marry for fear of increasing their Poverty. When they saw Idomeheus began to assume Sentiments of Humanity, and was willing to become their Father, they were no more in dread of Hunger, or the other Plagues with which Heaven afflicts the Earth. Nothing now was heard but Shouts of Joy, and the Songs of Shepherds and Husbandmen celebrating their Nuptial Ties. One would have thought that the God Pan was there with his Satyrs and Fauns, and mingled with the Nymphs dancing to the Flute's mellow Sound, beneath the Spreading Boughs: All was peaceful and smiling, not that the Joy was in the least immoderate; and those Pleasures served only to ease the Labours of the Day: so that every one became more fresh and lively for the Toils of the succeeding Day. The old Men, amazed to see what they durst not so much as hope for, so long as they lived, wept thro' an Excess of Joy, mixed with Tenderness; and lifting up their trembling Hands to Heaven: Oh! Jupiter, said they, blest the King who resembles thee, and is the greatest King thou ever madest: He is born for the Good of Mankind; return him all the Good which we receive from him! Our Children,*

Children, Sprung from those happy Marriages which he favours, shall be indebted to him, even for their very Birth, he will be truly the Father of all his Subjects. The young Men and Maidens in Couples joyfully shouted the Praises of him to whom they owed that pleasing Joy. All Mouths, nay more, all Hearts, were incessantly filled with his Praises. The Sight of him was accounted a great Happiness, and his Absence was the only thing they fear'd; the losing of him had been a fatal Blow to every Family, and to all Ranks and Conditions of Men.

I know the Restrictions which Religion prescribes to this Morality: The Church is indeed very far from forbidding Marriage, since besides the Spiritual Motives it proposes to those who embrace this State, it permits them also to have Regard to Birth, Riches, Agreement of Humour, and even to the Beauty of the Person they choose; *Jacob* not being reproved in Scripture for preferring *Rachel* to *Leah* because of her Beauty, *Neque in sacris Literis Jacob Patriarcha reprehenditur, quod Rachelem ejus pulchritudine illectus, Lia pretulerit.* Cat. Conc. Trid. de Matrim. Yet the Church prefers a State of Celibacy to Marriage. I am not ignorant in particular of a Passage in *St. Augustin*, where the End of the World, that would happen

happen upon the Cessation of Marriage, is called the happy Term and Period ; but I also know that still preserving this Sense and Temper of Mind in the secret Re-cesses of our Souls, Princes and Magistrates ought always to favour and encourage the only lawful and honourable Means of multiplying their Subjects and People, and to contribute all in their Power to the fulfilling of that natural Command the Creator laid upon Men, when he bid them encrease and multiply \*. And he who from any other Motive or Principle besides what flows from the most sublime and exalted Views of our holy Religion, would be glad to see the Number of Men diminish'd, should only be esteem'd an Enemy to the Publick, and Traitor to Society. Thus whilst our Preachers and Spiritual Guides, and Directors persuade pious Souls to a Contempt and Harred of the present State of this vain and wicked World, and to the Duties of Self-denial and Repentance ; our Poets ought to make it their principal Care and Business to persuade and engage Princes to introduce the most happy and flourishing Times, and to endeavour always to the utmost

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\* See F. Alexander de Marris.

of their Power to preserve and maintain their People in a State of general Peace and Plenty, and universal Joy: and these two Principles are as consistent as the Magnificence of a Man, who gives a great and noble Entertainment, is consistent with the Temperance the Guests ought to observe therein. Mr. *Quinault* seems to have had in his View this noble Design so worthy a great Poet in many of his Chorus's, and especially his Prologues, which Satire has censured as guilty of Flattery; as if the Praises which those very Criticks have so often themselves given to the greatest of Kings, were not carried as high as any we find in the Prologues to his Operas; excepting perhaps that they less concern the Happiness of the Publick, and are much less proper to induce and engage Princes, who may hereafter hear them, to imitate the Heroe for whom they were made. As we must always suppose the Inclination most Kings will have to their Pleasures, that have not attained the same Degree of Vertue and Piety he had, the Poets who write for the Stage ought to look upon themselves in one Sense as the principal if not the sole Teachers of Morality to Princes. In this View, they ought to inspire them, both in their Pro-



## Concerning OPERAS. 41

Prologues and Plays, with all the Vertues that can tend or contribute to the Welfare and Happiness of their Subjects, Clemency and Goodness, Truth and Justice, a deep and quick Sense of the Common Good, and publick Happiness, the only sure Source and Spring of the Prince's own; in this View Operas are as peculiarly proper, and as happily framed and adapted to insinuate the social and popular Vertues, as Tragedy is to inspire the Sublime and Heroick Ones, and I think Mr. *Quinault* has as happily succeeded in the one, as the great *Corneil* has done in the other. Operas thus wrote and compos'd have even this Advantage over Tragedy, that the social and popular Vertues being of a much more universal and extensive Use and Influence than the sublime and heroick Ones, Operas therefore must consequently prove much more generally useful to Princes than Tragedy; and what is yet of greater Importance, will also persuade them more effectually; for Vertue being there presented with all the Charms that can attend it, and sung, if I may so express it, with the Voice of *Syrens*, its Force and Influence must prove irresistibly prevalent and triumphant. 'Tis sometimes highly useful to present the Obligations and Duties

Duties of Princes, under the Notions and Ideas of Pleasure, for as we are only here concern'd with the social and political Vertues, 'tis principally of them that 'tis true to affirm that the agreeable Way and Manner is much more proper and effectual to persuade them than the severe One: But besides, a Moral Writer ought more to regard the happy Fruit and Success of his Instructions, than any Esteem or Reputation they may bring him with Persons of a grave Character, or too strict and severe a Vertue. I will illustrate this in an Example: If I should say a Crown is no desirable Thing, considering the Difficulty there is to perform all its Duties and Obligations; what would be the Effect of so grave and sublime a Maxim? Would it prevent any from accepting a Throne, who are call'd and invited thereto, how conscious soever of their own Weakness and Incapacity? It would rather incline 'em to neglect and forsake its Duties, as too hard and difficult to be perform'd; on the contrary if I say nothing is so easy and agreeable as for Kings and Princes to be morally Good and Vertuous, that the Pleasures they pursue ought not to prevent them from being just, and that there's nothing besides the exact Obedience and fervance

## Concerning OPERAS. 43

servance of the Laws of Mercy and Justice that can procure them and their Subjects any real Pleasure or lasting Happiness; this Moral perhaps might not gain me much Esteem or Honour among a certain Sort of People; but there's no Prince who hearing it, would not condemn himself if he neglected such easy and agreeable Duties, the complying with which would secure him so great and glorious a Reward. The Proposition hath also its Degree of Certainty; for tho' I know the Value and Esteem we ought to have of Care and Vigilance, and that such Writings as shew their Use and Importance are necessary and may be excellent; yet 'tis certain, as difficult as it is rightly to rule and govern Men upon Principles either of meer Religion or Policy, as easy is it rightly to manage and conduct them upon the easy, natural and simple Views of Justice and Goodness, which have always succeeded far better, and prov'd much more effectual than either the most abstracted and refin'd, or the most raised and sublime Notions and Theories, the subtillest Reasonings, or the most profound Searches and Enquiries.

But

But to introduce into Operas all the moral Instructions they are capable of, we must chuse Subjects of a higher and nobler Kind, than many of those that have been chose since Mr. *Quinault* wrote: For most of the modern Operas are only meer Love Pastorals, void of all other Interest, Example or Motive. Besides, in vindicating even Mr. *Quinault*'s Operas, or such as resemble them, I don't intend this Vindication aginst such Authors as have writ aginst the Stage and Romances upon Principles of Morality and Christian Piety: I leave their Arguments and Reasonings entire: And design what is here said, only aginst such Writers as are known by Compositions of a quite different Nature, such as Books of Wit, their Skill and Knowledge in classical Learning; and I affirm that I don't think such Authors ought to be allow'd to make use of Arguments drawn from Christian Theology aginst modern Compositions infinitely more modest and chaste than those Works of the Ancients, the Study and Reading of which they so passionately and perpetually recommend to us, and which by their Translations they take such Pains to render easy and intelligible to every common Capacity. Mr. B. for Example has printed at the End of his favourite Edition of



## Concerning OPERAS. 45

1701. the Letter of Compliment Mr. A. wrote to him. Mr. A. who had always declared against the Stage and Romances, says\* *What there is particular in our Satirist, and for which he is most to be esteemed and praised, is his shewing us with so much Strength of Wit and Argument the Injury which Operas, that all turn upon Love, and wherein are sung so many wanton and lascivious Airs do to Morality; since we can't imagine any Thing more proper to inflame the Passions, or corrupt the Heart. And two Pages after, he says, speaking of Clelia: The great Merits of the Author, nor yet the Esteem the Work has obtained in the World, are what don't concern us here; he might deserve it all, for the Wit and Politeness that shines therein, for the peculiar Felicity of his Invention, the Justness and Propriety of the Characters, and all the other Beauties and Ornaments that can render the Reading of Romances delightful and agreeable. Grant it, if you please, the greatest Master-Piece in this Sort of Writing, but 'tis still a Romance, this alone is sufficient to condemn it; the peculiar Character of these Compositions is to turn all upon Love, and to give Lessons and Instructions therein, in the most artful*

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\* P. 184. of Mr B. Vol.

and ingenious Manner, and which are still so much the better received, as in Appearance they avoid whatever seems grossly offensive and contrary to Chastity and Purity. Hereby 'tis young People are led unawares and insensibly to the very Brink of the Precipice. Without now examining the Force of such Reasonings; what is certain, is, that Mr. B. should not make use of 'em, nor ought to receive any Honour from them, because he is no sacred or religious Author. Nor ever condemned Operas and Romances, but purely upon Principles of Wit and prophane Criticism; even so far, that in an Adversisement we have cited elsewhere, he gives this Reason why there can be no good Operas, because the Passions can't be there drawn at their full length.

And if the Arguments taken from Operas and Romances turning upon Love and influencing the Passions, have so great Force in them, he should never have thus express'd himself in his *Art of Poetry*, 2d Canto.

*The Elegy that loves a mournful Stile,  
With unbound Hair weeps at a Funeral Pile,  
It paints the Lover's Torments and Delights,  
A Mistress flatters, threatens, and invites:*

*But*

## Concerning OPERAS. 47

But well these Raptures, if you'll make us  
see,

You must know Love as well as Poetry.  
I hate those Lukewarm Authors whose forc'd  
Fire

In a cold Stile describes a hot Desire,  
That sigh by Rule, and raging in cold Blood,  
Their sluggish Muse whip to an amorous  
Mood:

Their feign'd Transports appear but flat and  
vain,

They always sigh, and always hug their Chain;  
Adore their Prison, and their Sufferings  
bless,

Make Sense and Reason quarrel as they  
please.

'Twas not of old in this affecting Tone  
That smooth Tibullus made his amorous  
Moan;

Nor Ovid, when instructed from above  
By Nature's Rules, he taught the Art of Love.

Where we see Mr. B. praises an obscene  
Poem, for whose scandalous Immoralities,  
even a Pagan Emperor thought  
himself oblig'd to condemn its Author to  
an ignominious Banishment. Then speaking  
of the Ode, he adds,

Sometimes *she flies like an industrious Bee,  
And robs the Flowers by Nature's Chymistry,*  
De-

*Describes the Shepherds Dances, Feasts, and  
Bliss,*

*And boasts from Phillis to surprise a Kiss,  
When gently she resists with feign'd Remorse,  
That what she grants may seem to be by Force.*

In the 3d Canto, where he treats of Tragedy, he speaks yet more clearly, for he there makes it a Rule for the Pieces now under Debate, what Mr. *Arnaud* so expressly condemns in his Letter.

*Ingenious Love inventive in new Arts  
Mingled in Plays, and quickly touch'd our  
Hearts.*

*This Passion never could Resistance find,  
But knows the shortest Passages to the Mind.  
Paint them I'm pleas'd my Hero be in Love,  
But let him not like a tame Shepherd move.*

But lastly, what determines this Matter, and clearly discovers his Thoughts to be indeed directly contrary to those of Mr. *A. viz.* That amorous Lessons and Instructions are so much the more dangerous, as in Appearance they seem furthest remov'd from what is grossly offensive to Chastity and Purity; we need only read what Mr. *B.* says in his 4th Canto.

*Yet*



## Concerning OPERAS. 49

Tet do I not their Sullen Muse approve,  
Who from all modest Writings banish Love;  
That strip the Playhouse of its chief Intrigue,

And make a Murderer of a Roderigue\*:  
The lightest Love, if decently express'd,  
Will raise no vicious Motion in our Breast.

Dido in vain may weep; and ask Relief;  
I blame her Folly, whilst I share her Grief.  
A virtuous Author, in his charming Art,  
To please the Sense, need not corrupt the Heart;

His Heat will never cause a guilty Fire,  
&c.

'Tis true Mr. B. provoked to see the Publick in their Approbation of *Quinault's* Operas, condemn his Censure of them, in his latter Days, embraced the Party of those call'd the rigid Moralists, as we see by his Satire against Women, and knew also from his private Conversation. Several of our Poets, by way of Satisfaction for some looser poetical Compositions wrote by them in their younger Years, have published in a more advanced Age, moral or devout Poems; *Corneil* translated *Thomas a Kempis*, *Racin* publish'd *Æsther*

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\* In the Cid of *Corneil*.

and *Athalia*; but Mr. B. indulging a Devotion agreeable to his particular Humour and Genius, as the genuine Fruit and Effect of his Repentance, employ'd his Time and Talents in Defamation and Satire, to be revenged of the Publick, which notwithstanding his particular Decision continued to shew a general Goodliking and Affection for so innocent and useful an Entertainment, as that of Operas, which he would have depriv'd them of. But as his Censure and Criticisms, attack the Wisdom of the Government, and might transmit to Posterity a false and injurious Opinion of the present Age, I am glad of this Opportunity here, to observe, how the Prudence, Virtue, and Piety of that great Prince who sits at the Helm, and so happily govern us, assisted with the Wisdom and Diligence of those illustrious Magistrates, to whom the Administration of such Affairs is more immediately committed, preserve and maintain a City so great and sumptuous as *Paris*, in a Decorum and Regularity, which future Ages will hardly believe; the Peace and Tranquility of the Places of the greatest Concourse and Resort during the Day, and the Safety and Security of the most private and abandon'd, during

Concerning OPERAS. 51

ring the Night, is not more wonderful, than that timorous Diffidence, and Caution with which, if I may so exprefs it, even Vice its self is forced to hide and cover its Head, by the great Care there is taken to suppress whatever may introduce into the Publick, an Air of Libertinism or Licentiousness. But if there's any one Place where the Vigilance of the Magistrate shines more conspicuous than another, 'tis certainly at our Publick Theatres. The *Lacedemonians*, by an Abuse of Terms as ridiculous, as the Thing it self was absurd and abominable, pretended that their Daughters, who us'd publickly to wrestle naked together, and sometimes even with Men, were cover'd and defended by the publick Virtue. But tho' indeed our Scenes and Theaters display whatever there is in the World, that's most pompous, and glorious, beautiful or charming; yet we may truly say, that there the publick Virtue presides before our Eyes, governs and directs with the utmost Exactness whatever passes. With these Precautions, our Magistrates favour and encourage Theatrical Performances; they look upon them as a necessary Amusement of a innumerable Company of Youth, bold and enterprizing, rash, and impetuous, who are hereby di-

verted from an infinite Number of vicious and injurious Actions, criminal in themselves, and dangerous to the Publick. Besides, the Assemblies which are here form'd of Persons of the first Quality of the Kingdom, with those of the middle Rank, inspire these with Politeness, and the other with a publick Virtue and Love of their Country. All the polite Arts, the Knowledge of which, according to the just Observation of one of the wise Ancients, so effectually inspires Mens Minds with Virtue and Humanity, seem all to conspire in the Opera to form the Manners, to polish and refine the Taste of the Spectators. Poetry, which is still the Basis of all, and to which all is ultimately refer'd, generally gives us there Lessons of Virtue and Honour, Loyalty and Fidelity to our Prince, Love and Affection for our Country. I know that all the Virtues were much more valuable and meritorious, if they enter'd the Mind in the way of Christian Instruction, and were practis'd upon religious Principles and Motives; therefore our Preachers have great Reason to dissuade their Auditors from such Diversions and Entertainments, who are capable of a higher and better School; but the Bulk of Mankind are not; yet 'tis the



the Interest of the Publick, that Men should not become Savage and Barbarous again, as History shews us they almost all were, even at the time when they shew'd the strongest Affection for Religion, and the warmest Zeal against the Infidel Nations, and lived under the most virtuous and religious of all our Princes. Dramatick Representations, and Theatrical Performances, but especially Tragedy, representing Persons endow'd with great Sentiments of Honour and Generosity, full of Esteem and Regard, even for their Enemies, personating Characters possess'd of all the humane and social Virtues, effectually expel and extinguish in the Souls of the generality of Men, all the Seeds of Cruelty and Barbarity: I need only produce in Proof and Confirmation of this, the Difference there is between the *French* of the present Age, beginning from the Restoration of our Theatre, and the *French* in all preceding Ages. But to preserve this Advantage, we must maintain the Theatre in great Modesty and Decorum, and banish from it all obscene, and vicious Representations; for as certainly as virtuous and honourable Love inspires us with Politeness, Vertue and Honour, so certainly will loose and immoral Representations

tions corrupt and debauch Men, and render them cruel, dissolute and brutal. And a nice Observation of this Modesty and Decorum upon our Theatres, will also more than any Thing else, heighten and improve the Beauty and Lustre of the Representation; for wherever Looseness and Immorality enters, tho' never so gradually and insensibly, all that depends upon the finest Wit, and brightest Sense, will soon expire and vanish. Such as pretend that these Precautions only render the Stage more dangerous, would yet be sorry, I suppose, if upon their Decision we substituted in the Room of our modest Scenes, those infamous and scandalous Representations which *Arnobius* and *Lactantius* so loudly and justly reproached the *Pagan* World with; and which, having continued under the first Christian Emperors, armed against them *St. Chrysostom*, *St. Ambrose*, and so many other of the ancient Fathers. The Learned Dissertation of *Rivinus*, entitled *de Majumis*, and printed in *Grevius's* Collection of *Roman* Antiquities, excuses me from describing them here in a modern Language. The Christian Religion which prevailed more and more, at last abolish'd these horrid and scandalous Abuses and Excesses; but that Vertue and

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Modesty which is at present the distinguishing Character of the *French* Theatre, has not equally obtained nor prevailed in all other Christian Nations. Therefore Mr. A. exaggerates, when in his Letter, speaking of the Opera Songs, he says: *But what is worst of all, is, that the Poison of those lewd and lascivious Songs, don't terminate in the Place where they are sung, and those Pieces affect.* There never were any lewd or lascivious Songs heard at our Operas. Mr. A. very well distinguishes vicious Terms and Expressions in Point of Chastity, from those that are not so, by saying \* that the first presents Vice to the Imagination, which is what is always forbidden; and that the other presents it only to the Mind and Judgment, which is allowed, and may even be useful, viz. when 'tis done to inspire us with a Detestation and Horror thereof. But he should also have distinguish'd both in Prose and Verse, what is only Gallant, from what is Lascivious and Obscene, For these three are in themselves very different, as all who understand any thing of the Justness and Propriety of Language, will immediately own. Obscene Discourse, is where

vicious Ideas and Images are exprest in the grossest Terms that Lewdness and Debauchery it self has produc'd, such as we frequently meet with in *Rabelais*. A lascivious Discourse, is where sparing the Reader those gross Terms, we yet present him under others less offensive and more chast, vicious and impure Images; or 'tis a Discourse, wherein without directly presenting him with such Images, we yet insensibly lead him on, by a Narration, or in a soft and effeminate Conversation, to the immediate Action, even tho' that itself should be suppress'd. Several of *Fontain's* Tales are lascivious in the first Sense, and some Passages of *Homer* himself, as the Interview of *Paris* with *Helen* in the 3d B. and the seducing of *Juno* by *Jupiter* in the 13th, are so in the second. Now 'tis only of the lascivious Style it holds true, that 'tis infinitely more dangerous than the obscene one; but both are equally included and contained under the Impudent and Vicious, and equally forbid every wise and sober Writer by his own Conscience, and our Opera Theatres, by the Care and Vigilance of our Magistrates. With respect to Gallantry the Case is different, and we own 'tis there allow'd and admitted; upon which Account, the Poems there sung, may



## Concerning OPERAS. 57

may be call'd profane or amorous Songs, but never lascivious ones, by any Writer who prefers Justness and Propriety of Thought and Expression, to the Warmth and Vehemence of Style and Imagination. After all, Mr. *A.* who was a Clergyman, and of a Party that made publick Profession of the severe Morality, and who only knew Operas at second Hand, and by the relation of others, was not much obliged to any great exactness of Terms in treating this Subject; and I only design this Censure against Mr. *B.* who has himself compos'd a Prologue for an Opera, printed in his *Posthumous* Edition. 'Tis he who has impertinently given the Epithet of *Slippery* or *Lubrique* to the Opera, for the greater Advantage of his Rhime, or rather to gratify his Revenge, which notwithstanding the many Reparations he had already been obliged to make the publick on this Account in several of his Prefaces, was not yet extinct even by the Death of Mr. *Quinault*. When such a Censor, *i. e.* a Man without any Station or Character in the Church, turns Reformer, and sets up for a Preacher, and declaims against Publick Spectacles, or Theatrical Representations, tho' maintain'd by the Care and Vigilance of the

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Magistrates in all the exactest observance of civil Decorum; instead of being a useful or a moral Author, as he fancies himself, he only degenerates into a pretended Reformer, a vain and empty Declaimer; because the only Morality proper for an Author of this Character, is what tends to the actual and temporal Felicity and Advantage of Society.

But Mr. B. is yet more injurious to Mr. *Quinault*, when he says, we learn from his *Roland* and *Rinaldo*.

*By them that Love's a Sovereign God to  
know*

*And all to his Divinity must bow,  
Ev'n Vertue's Self must yield—*

We might first reply to his Accusation, that we should not impute to a Dramatick Poet, all the Sentiments of his Persons. What would become of Mr. B. if we should make him answerable for all the Follies, and even Impieties some of the Persons in his *Lutrin* are guilty of;

*Actions on Actions, Suits on Suits shall tell  
The Church's Spirit, and her Servants Zeal.*

*Thus*

## Concerning OPERAS. 59

*Thus authoriz'd by Heav'n you may engage,  
This is a War worthy a Prelate's Rage.\**

not to mention an infinite Number of others; but indeed, a Poet is not properly answerable for any Discourses but such as proceed from Persons he himself proposes as Patterns of moral Vertue and Goodness, and this only too, supposing them in their natural State and Condition. I would condemn, for Instance, that Passage in the Tragedy of *Phædra*, where *Theramene*, a grave and serious Person, and one to whom *Theseus* had intrusted the Education of his Son, says to *Hippolitus*,

*Will you still be over-aw'd by a superstitious  
Scruple?*

*Are you afraid to imitate Hercules's Example?*

*What Courage has not Venus subdu'd—*

in order to engage the young Prince to comply with a Passion forbid him by his Father: But which, had it been never so lawful, and allowed him, yet such an Invitation and Encourage-

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\* *First Capto.*

ment

ment was not proper for a Governour, whose principal Business was rather to subdue and moderate, than excite and animate those violent and unruly Passions which Nature generally but too soon and powerfully excites of it self. But Mr. *Quinault* here only proposes *Roland* and *Rinaldo* as Persons in a State of Guilt and Weakness; we must not therefore impute to the Poet all they say in such a State. Yet as they are Heroes in whose Favour he designs to engage his Spectators and Readers, he never once thought of putting in their Mouths so odious and pernicious a Maxim as that he's here accus'd of by Mr. *B.* he who knew so well how to soften and rectify even the most vicious Persons; as when he makes *Medea* thus express herself to *Theseus*.

*'Twas Medea's hard Fate to be destin'd to be  
Criminal,  
But her Soul was made for the Love of Vertue.*

He was far from imitating *Homer*, who fills the Speeches of his Heroes, with whatever can render them odious and contemptible. We need only here recite what *Roland* himself says of his Love and Passion in the first Acts



## Concerning OPERAS. 61

ACTS, to shew what cruel Labour and Pains it cost him, and how far he was from thinking he ought to sacrifice even Vertue itself to it, where he expresses himself thus.

‘ What’s become of my Virtue, all  
‘ my Courage is useless; and what signifies it to possess the Gifts *Achilles* formerly had, since I leave my Prince without Help or Support? He has now only *Paris* left to defend him; alas! the cruel *Africans* will soon triumph over him; I see the deplorable State and Condition of my County, ’tis just ready to fall under the Power and Laws of those *Barbarians*, I hear its Sighs and Groans; but ’tis in vain it cries out for my Help and Assistance, an unfortunate Passion enchants and fixes me in these Woods.

And in the 3d ACT, speaking to *Angelica*.

‘ Alas! I now know sufficiently with what cruel Rigour you punish my effeminate Heart, your Contempt is apparent, ’tis now too late to feign, all Disguises are vain; I can easily forgive the Contempt of the rest of Mortals, I

' I have justly deserv'd it, 'twere unjust  
 ' to complain; I abandoned and betrayed  
 ' all my Honour and Glory, and suffered  
 ' it to fade and tarnish; I cherish'd the  
 ' Dart that wounded me, I cou'd not  
 ' break the Snare that seduced me; but  
 ' you were the Occasion of all this Frail-  
 ' ty and Weakness; ought you then thus  
 ' cruelly to punish me?

But in the 5th Act, after *Logisil* had  
 calm'd *Roland's* Fury, and restored him  
 to himself again by that admirable In-  
 vocation.

*Rendez à ce Heros vòtre clarté celeste.*

*Divine Raison, revenez !*

*Qu'un cœur est malheureux quand vous l'a-  
bandonnez*

*Dans un égarement funeste !*

' Restore to this Heroe your celestial  
 ' Light: Divine Reason once again shine  
 ' inward and irradiate his Mind. How  
 ' unhappy is that Soul whom you a-  
 ' bandon to fatal Delusion and Error.

Now observe what *Roland* says, who  
 is accus'd of teaching, that we ought to  
 sacrifice even Vertue it self to the Pas-  
 sion of Love.

' What

## Concerning OPERAS. 63

‘ What secret but powerful Assist-  
‘ ance do I now feel, disengaging  
‘ me of this fatal Passion and Flame!  
‘ Oh Heavens! Can I now think with-  
‘ out the utmost Confusion and Horror,  
‘ on that strange Disorder to which it  
‘ reduced me? Wandering and roving  
‘ about, foolish and furious, I exhibi-  
‘ ted a miserable Spectacle of Hu-  
‘ mane Frailty and Weakness; what  
‘ Reproaches ought I not forever to make  
‘ myself, O wretched Man! now that  
‘ Reason once again returns and shines  
‘ upon me, only to lay open before  
‘ me all my own Shame and In-  
‘ famy? What a terrible Punishment  
‘ is it, to survive Honour and Glory?  
‘ Unfortunate *Roland*, go and find out  
‘ some dark and remote solitary Cave,  
‘ go, and there if possible conceal your  
‘ self for ever from your self in an eter-  
‘ nal Obscurity.

*Legislil* then answers to *Roland*.

‘ Calm a little, and temper that deep  
‘ Sorrow and Anguish, which now seizes  
‘ your Soul; what Hero, what Conque-  
‘ ror, was ever exempt from all humane  
‘ Frailty and Weakness?

This

This last Answer, which appears to me extremely wise and judicious, may deserve here a little serious Reflection and Consideration before we proceed further, tho' it may at first Sight seem to have some Affinity and Resemblance to *Therame's* Discourse condemn'd above. But the Time, Circumstances, and Design, renders it very different; for nothing is so imprudent and pernicious, as to extenuate Faults to a Person who was never yet guilty of them, this being in a Manner to invite and tempt him to commit them; whereas it may be very just and wise to excuse them to a Hero, who is immoderately affected and griev'd for having committed them; because this is to raise and comfort him, and restore him again to a State and Condition of becoming useful to Mankind.

And with Reference to this Opera of *Rinaldo* in particular, nothing can so effectually shew the Modesty and Decorum of our Stage and Poetry, as the Omissions and Alterations which Mr. *Quinault* has made in the Original of *Tasso*; whether upon Occasion of the Entrance and Avenue of *Armida's* enchanted Pallace, and the Objects that there occur, which are describ'd in the 15th Canto, or in her Conversati-  
on



Concerning OPERAS. 65

on with *Rinaldo* in his Gardens, related in the 16th Canto of *Gierusalemme Liberata*. We must indeed own that in the first Scene of the 5th Act, *Rinaldo*, overcome as it were by the Charms of this Magician, seems to consent to a Love inconsistent with his Duty and Obligations; where he says:

‘ How foolish was I once to think or  
‘ imagine that a poor fading Laurel obtain’d by Victory, was the Top of all  
‘ humane Felicity! Is all the Pomp, and  
‘ Lustre of humane Glory comparable to  
‘ one kind Look, or gracious Smile of  
‘ yours? Or any other Pleasure or Happiness  
‘ equally endearing and transporting,  
‘ ing, as the Possession of your Charms?

But besides that to prefer Love to the Glory of Arms is not the same as to sacrifice Vertue itself to it, by what strong and pathetick Discourses doth he soon make amends for this his Error and Mistake, when he recovers himself again?

‘ O Heavens! How I blush to appear  
‘ in the wretched and infamous State  
‘ and Condition in which I am in!

E Says

Says he immediately; and then afterwards:

‘ Vain Ornaments of a degenerate and  
‘ effeminate Mind, tempt me no more  
‘ with your trifling and empty Charms;  
‘ infamous Remains of humane Weak-  
‘ nefs and Frailty, be gone, I banish you  
‘ for ever.

And Lastly, when even addressing *Armida* herself, who would have detained him, he thus expresses himself:

*Armide, il est temps que j'évite  
Le peril trop charmant que je trouve à vous  
voir;*

*La Gloire veut que je vous quitte,  
Elle ordonne à l'amour de ceder au devoir.*

‘ *Armida*, 'tis time I avoid the too  
‘ powerful and charming Danger I find  
‘ in approaching you; Glory requires I  
‘ now leave and abandon you, it com-  
‘ mands my Passion to yield and submit  
‘ to the sovereign Orders of Duty and  
‘ Reason.

Don't this last Line especially demon-  
strate the great Truth and Candour of  
of Mr. B. when he says that we learn  
from

## Concerning OPERAS. 67

from *Rinaldo*, that we ought to make a Sacrifice of even Vertue itself to the Passion of Love? But as 'tis difficult to speak a great deal without being guilty of some Falshood or other, so also it is not easy one's whole Life to make Profession of Satire, without being guilty of Slander and Calumny.

To conclude, Mr. *Quinault* is the first who introduced into the World a great Number of Airs, and other Pieces of Musick, where Vertue is recommended, and true Hero's are praised. Before his Operas, the *French* Musick contained only merry or amorous Songs, in praise of *Bacchus* or *Venus*, or some other such trifling Subjects, like those of *Anacreon*, which Madam D. has taken such learned and laborious Pains to give us a Translation of. 'Tis only since the Introduction of Operas, we have seen so many Recitatives and Chorus's, where the most perfect Reason and the most sublime and heroick Sentiments are made to concur and unite, and plac'd in a new and beautiful Light. I don't pretend by this that Mr. *Quinault's* Operas are without their Faults, and want no Correction; but I make a great Difference between Faults in Morality that only proceed from want of Judgment or Attention in the Poet, and Compositions

con-

## 68 *A Discourse, &c.*

contrary to the Principles and Rules of Morality, and even to our Laws themselves; as some learned but weak and prejudic'd Persons have accus'd those we here treat of. After all, we hope the Principles laid down in this Discourse may be of use to reform and improve all sorts of Pieces; and I have only wrote it to assist and promote the just and honourable Designs of those, who without Contempt for their Country, and free from little Jealousies of Authors who have gloriously attempted to render our Publick Diversions and Theatrical Representations both entertaining and improving, desire only to render them still more agreeable and instructive, more universally useful and beneficial to the Publick.

*F I N I S.*





